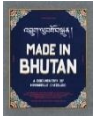


REVIEW: *MADE IN BHUTAN*

Reviewed by Alexander R O'Neill



Hirondelle Chatelard (director, producer). 2013. *Made in Bhutan*. Thimpu: The Loden Foundation. 33 mins. <http://bit.ly/2ucz5EM>. Color.

With the new idea, it's not necessary that you have to forgo or forget your old tradition. You can have your old tradition, you can practice whatever you've been doing all along, and at the same time be open to new ideas and new thinking that new people bring in. - Nawang Tshering, *The Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs*

Bhutan, well recognized for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index, has pursued growth strategies that integrate heritage preservation with UN Sustainable Development Goals. Buttressed by isolationist policies, however, its efforts have resulted in both a lagging national economy and rampant youth unemployment. *Made in Bhutan* is a short documentary that highlights local responses to these conditions since 2010. Set in the capital, Thimphu, it follows Bhutanese entrepreneurs as they navigate private sector ventures with potential for social impact.

The film opens with a discussion of market liberalization in the Eastern Himalayas. For centuries, kings dictated Bhutan's economy with absolute authority; civil service was a common career path for many Bhutanese. In modern times, regional markets and population expansion have placed significant stress on these ancient institutions. Rural poverty, substance abuse, and rampant unemployment threaten the heritage of this Himalayan state. *Made in Bhutan* is refreshingly candid about many of these issues, even though it provides but cursory context for its economic woes.

Karma Phunthsho, Founder of The Loden Foundation, comments on some of these challenges:

---

O'Neill, Alexander R. 2018. Review: *Made in Bhutan*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 51:422-423.

There are many villages around here, in Western Bhutan, that are nearly vacant because children come to live in Thimpu and work in Thimphu. Parents then follow their children to live in Thimpu. As a result, we rely more on India for these products and for the commodities that we consume daily. And with that, there is also a lot of cultural heritage being lost.

The Loden Foundation, Bhutan's first registered charity, has taken the helm in promoting a new wave of entrepreneurship in the Buddhist kingdom. Since 2008, the NGO has funded over sixty businesspeople with interest-free seed money to start their own companies. These efforts have reinvigorated the private sector, and generated hundreds of employment opportunities across the country. Some surveyed programs include an incense factory run from a monastery, a waste management and recycling center, and tire upcycling and sale center.

With nearly half of the population under twenty-five (48.9 percent), the Royal Government of Bhutan hopes that future generations will continue integrating Bhutanese heritage into global markets. "Economic growth is important for GNH," says Tshering Tobgay, the Prime Minister of Bhutan. "GNH is simply a reminder that economic growth is not the only goal. It is not the be all end all of a nation's objective."

Prime Minister Tobgay's message is a central theme of this documentary. It recognizes that many factors are driving social change in Bhutan as it diverges from the pervasive image of the country as a monastic time capsule. Here, it is portrayed as a dynamic nation on the brink of modernity - a place where the government cannot address development challenges alone.

The film would have benefitted from a more robust discussion of Bhutan's economy, and quantitative vignettes on capital earned from surveyed businesses. Many of the projects appear quite niche and aimed solely at domestic sales or tourist markets.

Overall, the documentary will interest development workers, or those interested in modern Bhutan. Its inspirational tone and length also make it suitable for course material.